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from *Strike!* by Danny Schur and Rick Chafe

Read It Here

Project Bookmark Canada places stories and poems in the exact Canadian locations where literary scenes are set. A Canadian innovation, it is the only national, site-specific literary exhibit in the world.

This Bookmark was unveiled on the Canadian Literary Trail on Labour Day 2019. It is funded by the Government of Canada, the City of Winnipeg, and individual donors.

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Act II Scene I

Victoria Park. A crowd of thousands surrounds a make-shift wooden stage.

CROWD Hear us out! Hear us out!

A.J. ANDREWS, former mayor and leader of the Citizens' Committee of One Thousand, addresses the crowd.

ANDREWS I will not be provoked.
The motive behind this strike is clearly the overthrow of constitutional government.

HELEN ARMSTRONG, Winnipeg's staunch activist for working class and women's rights, ascends the stage.

HELEN ARMSTRONG (singing)
He won't meet us
He won't speak t'us
He'll just improvise invective
Posturing with yammering
'Bout quelling rebellious
Activity

ANDREWS (singing) I don't bargain
I won't pardon
I won't recognize collective
Bargaining as anything
But tampering with governing
Authority

ALL & ANDREWS Ultimatum
My [His] words verbatim
Debate them
Mistake them? Best ye [we] not

Ultimatum
Your [Our] jobs: vacate them
Negate them
Erase them, pensions gone
Ultimatum
Your [Our] hopes, I'll [he'll] break them
Deflate them
Replacements take your [our] jobs

The crowd screams insults at ANDREWS.

ANDREWS Disperse yourselves immediately.
I will not bargain with a mob.
The government of Canada will not
give in to the threat of a general strike.
(singing) You must yield first
Sign this deal first
This takes force immediately by
Severing your unioning,
Eliminating striking but
You'll have jobs

HELEN ARMSTRONG (singing)
There's no parting
From our starving
But he wounds our dignity with
Patronizing, taxing lies
Impeding us and feeding us straight
To the dogs

ALL & ANDREWS
Ultimatum
My [His] words verbatim

Debate them
Mistake them? Best ye [we] not
Ultimatum
Your [Our] jobs: vacate them
Negate them
Erase them, pensions gone
Ultimatum
Your [Our] hopes, I'll [he'll] break them
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ANDREWS exits. *The strikers' solidarity is at a fever pitch and the whole group is in no mood for compromise.*

HELEN ARMSTRONG (shouting)
They demand we go back to work at 10:00
a.m. tomorrow! What do we say to that?

STRIKERS (shouting with defiant fists in the air)
NO!!

HELEN ARMSTRONG And they demand we
end our union affiliation—

STRIKERS NO!!

HELEN ARMSTRONG And they demand we
never take part in a General Strike again—

STRIKERS NO!! NO!! NO!!

ALL (singing)
Ultimatum
Our hopes – can't take 'em
Or break 'em
Forsake them we will not!

On May 15, 1919, 35,000 men, women and children walked off the job in a six-week long confrontation that brought life in Winnipeg to a standstill. Fought by working class families for the right to union recognition, shorter hours of work, and a living wage, the strike drew the attention of much of the industrialized world to Winnipeg. The strike ended in bloodshed when government authorities used military force to establish their control over the city. Two workers died and many were injured in the events of "Bloody Saturday." (Sharon Reilly and Nolan Reilly, 2007).

Danny Schur is a Juno Award-winning composer and music producer and Winnipeg's most successful composer, writer, and producer of new musicals. Rick Chafe is a Governor General's Award for Drama finalist whose plays have been produced across the country. *Strike!* won the Kobzar Literary Award and the Grant MacEwan College Kostash Award, and was adapted to the major motion picture *Stand!*

STRIKE!, a musical by Danny Schur and Rick Chafe was published by Playwrights Canada Press (The Canadian Drama Publisher) in 2007. This excerpt is used with the kind permission of the publisher.